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U.S. pressure on Sandinistas is working, congressmen told

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WASHINGTON — Reagan Administration officials suggested to congressmen Wednesday that U.S. pressures on Nicaragua have succeeded in forcing the Sandinista government to trim its revolutionary sails.

The Navy admitted, meanwhile, that the missile frigate USS McCormick had hailed a Nicaraguan-bound Soviet ship in the first known U.S. approach to vessels allegedly carrying weapons to the Sandinistas.

The McCormick is on maneuvers off Nicaragua in what U.S. officials say is part of a campaign to pressure the Sandinistas to stop exporting their revolution abroad and adopt democratic policies at home.

Langhorne Motley, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, suggested at a congressional hearing that the pressures — including those exerted by CIA-backed Nicaraguan guerrillas — have begun to work.

Motley and two other top administration officials indicated to a joint

session of two House Foreign Affairs subcommittees that the rebels' activities had forced Sandinista leaders to worry more about their internal problems than about "destabilizing" their neighbors.

"They have had to look inward," said Motley, who was accompanied by Nestor Sanchez, deputy assistant secretary of defense for inter-American affairs, and assistant secretary of state for human rights Elliott Abrams.

The statements by Motley, Sanchez and Abrams were unusually frank — apparently part of an effort to mend the damage caused by the House vote last week to cut off CIA aid to the rebels.



When Rep. Ed Zschau (R., Calif.) asked Motley whether the United States is backing the rebels in order to force democracy on Nicaragua, the State Department official did not demur.

"We would like to see a government integrating democratic elements," he said, adding that Washington "would be pleased if the Sandinista government were to be motivated in order to go in the direction that the Salvadorans are trying to go."

When Rep. Stephen Solarz (D., N.Y.) asked how effective the CIA-backed rebels had been in interdicting Sandinista arms shipments to El Salvador, Sanchez answered that "interdiction efforts have resulted

in a diminution of the flow of arms."

Abrams, the State Department's human rights specialist, suggested that the guerrillas' role would diminish if Nicaragua turned to democracy and stopped violating the human rights of its people.

Abrams' comment prompted a sharp exchange with Rep. Michael Barnes (D., Md.), an administration critic, who asked, "Did you in fact say that the pressure the United States is bringing against Nicaragua is part of our human-rights policy?"

"What I said was," said Abrams, "we are pressuring Nicaragua, just like we are pressuring the other countries in the area, to move in the direction of democracy."

"Well," said Barnes, "we haven't hired 10,000 or 12,000 guerrillas to invade Chile."

At the Pentagon, Navy Cmdr. Fred Leeder confirmed that the McCormick "questioned a Soviet ship Saturday in international waters prior to the Soviet cargo ship entering a Nicaraguan port. It was never impeded at all. It was merely questioned by radio."

Leeder's version coincided with a

Cuban news agency report Tuesday that a U.S. warship hailed the Soviet freighter Alexander Ulyanov and asked it to identify itself, list its cargo and give its destination just before it anchored off the Nicaraguan port of Corinto Saturday.

The Associated Press quoted Pentagon sources as saying that the

McCormick's request for the Ulyanov's identification and destination was not unusual, but that the query about its cargo was "not normal."

Although the Ulyanov's skipper was not obligated to reply to the question about his load, sources said the Soviet captain told the Americans that it had general cargo aboard.

This report was supplemented by Herald wire services.